

Getting real about food

BACKGROUNDER FOR EDUCATORS

Pre-prepared, processed, and other convenience foods have become normalized food choices; in fact, in 2004, 48% of calories consumed by Canadians came from highly processed foods.ⁱⁱⁱ While some processing of whole foods or ingredients is necessary, highly processed foods have very little nutritional value and high amounts of added sugar, fat, salt, and additives that prevent food spoilage. In many cases, the nutrients have been removed to allow the processed food to last longer. And yet, convenience foods often come in misleading packaging that would make you believe that they are healthy.



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Kids will gain a better understanding of what it means for a food to be healthy and learn to distinguish between whole foods, minimally processed foods and highly processed foods.



SPECIAL MATERIALS NEEDED

- Paper, crayons or markers for drawing
- Example foods ranging from whole foods to lightly processed to heavily processed
- [Food Detective worksheet](#)



SAMPLE TIMING AND FLOW

- 10 min Picture your Favourite Food
- 5-10 min Introduction to Whole Foods & Food line-up
- 40 min Meal Preparation
- 15 min Food Detectives
- 25 min Garden Activity
- 15 min Meal Sharing
- 5 min Clean-up

ACTIVITIES

PICTURE YOUR FAVOURITE FOOD

As kids are arriving, ask them to draw a picture of their favourite food. (This can be used later as foods to add to the food line-up.)

WHAT IS HEALTHY FOOD?

There are lots of different aspects of what makes a food healthy or unhealthy, and one of these is how and to what level the food has been processed.

Ask: Does anyone know what we mean by whole foods?

This is a different concept than taking a whole apple, for example, and calling it not “whole” after it’s been cut in half. Whole foods are still in their original form (or very close) to the way they come from plants and animals. They are fresh foods! They are full of the nutrients our bodies need to be strong and healthy.

Ask: Does anyone know what processed food means?

Processed foods are those that have been changed, sometimes a little and sometimes a lot, from their original form. There are different levels of processing: some foods have only been changed a little, like a whole grain loaf of bread, for example; and others like boxed macaroni and cheese and chicken nuggets have been changed a lot.

Name some foods and ask them whether they are whole or processed foods (e.g., apple, apple slices, apple juice, apple flavoured granola bar). As a group, contrast whole foods and processed foods—what are some ways to tell the difference? Almost every food you buy in a packet, box or tub is processed in some way. Many of these foods have been produced in factories.

FOOD LINE-UP

Display a variety of foods on a table. Ask participants to place the foods into a line-up of least to most processed.

Ask: What are some clues that help you determine this? Number of ingredients? Packaging? Why should we try to limit the amount of processed food we eat? What happens when food is overly processed?

Over-processing removes nutrients and adds excessive sugar, fat, and salt to foods. This makes it tricky, because adding all that fat, sugar and salt can make processed food taste really good, but it is actually a lot less healthy than whole foods.

FOOD DETECTIVES

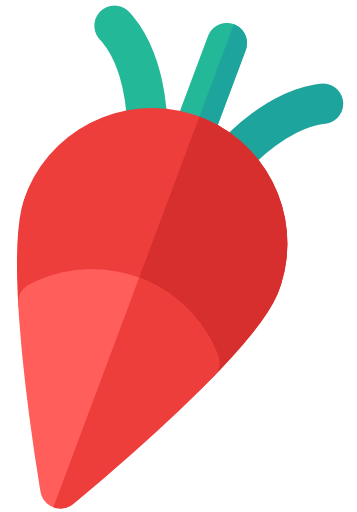
Every type of food has a story, but for many foods that story is a mystery. Labels and packaging are good places to look for clues for your food’s story.

Pass out **Food Detective worksheet** and have kids work in pairs or larger groups and write their answers on chart paper. Once groups have answered the questions about their foods, bring the group back together and support kids in placing the foods into the line-up of least to most processed food.

EXAMPLES

WHOLE FOOD	PROCESSED
Tomato	Ketchup: added sugar and salt
Green bean	Canned beans: Has a lot of added salt. Energy used during processing.
Oatmeal	Flavoured instant oatmeal: added sugar, nutrients removed, packaging.
Apple	Apple juice: while some might be pure many have added ingredients including lots of sugar.

Time permitting, have kids place their Favourite Foods (their drawings from the start) along the processed food line up. Next, have kids draw a picture of a less processed version of their favourite food (Hint: what was one of the original ingredients?)



RECIPE SUGGESTIONS

Pick recipes that use whole ingredients like blueberry-bran muffins or homemade granola bars.



FOOD FUN FOR ALL!

When talking about processed foods, be aware that many people eat these foods, and for many kids, this will be the kind of food that is most readily available to them. We don’t want to shame anyone for eating these foods. Avoid attaching moral judgements by calling foods “bad” and “good”. Instead, focus on the idea that as much as possible, we want to be fueling our bodies and minds with foods that have the most quantity and variety of nutrients. This means replacing foods with fewer or little nutrients.



SUGGESTED GARDEN ACTIVITY

If you’re starting your program in the spring or early summer, then starting seeds now will mean the kids will be able to watch their plants grow throughout the program. If it’s not an appropriate time to start seeds, the **Seed Matching** activity is a good way to introduce seeds.



EXTRA RESOURCES

- **Canada’s Food Guide** can help you choose food wisely
- **Food Banks Canada** has a selection of **nutrition resources** including: nutrition activity sheets for kids, ‘Doing more with less’, and ‘Planning healthy family meals’.